

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 292 162

CS 506 082

AUTHOR Thorpe, Judie Mosier
TITLE The Responsible Media Communicator: Guidelines for Consulting in the Information Age.
PUB DATE Apr 88
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Speech Association (Schaumburg, IL, April 6-8, 1988).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Codes of Ethics; *Consultants; Corporate Education; Inplant Programs; Institutions; Mass Media; *Media Specialists; Organizational Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Consultant Role

ABSTRACT

As more and more organizations are utilizing media such as videotape, electronic mail, computer-based training, and video-conferencing, the role of the media professional becomes more crucial. The responsible media communicator must be cognizant of the ethical concerns of the consultant and adapt these to the special needs of the client and the technology used. Since research has shown that in the past media consultants have sometimes been involved in unethical practices, a set of guidelines for media professionals would be a timely contribution to the emerging field. It has been proposed that responsible media consultants: (1) will not oversell their expertise; (2) will detail their activities for the organization in contract form; (3) preserve client confidentiality; and (4) ensure the safety of the organization's information. In addition, as Gerald Goldhaber points out in "Organizational Communication," a consultant who is providing training should: (5) treat trainees with dignity; (6) provide opportunities for self-actualization for trainees; (7) encourage critical thinking; (8) devote explicit attention to ethical problems; (9) show concern for long-term development of trainees' careers; and (10) if a university faculty member, the trainer should take care that consulting does not jeopardize either an employer or client. (Forty-four references are attached.) (ARH)

* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *

ED292162

THE RESPONSIBLE MEDIA COMMUNICATOR:
GUIDELINES FOR CONSULTING IN THE INFORMATION AGE

by

Judie Mosier Thorpe
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
Department of Speech
Oshkosh, Wisconsin 54901

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS
MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Judith Mosier Thorpe

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve
reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this docu-
ment do not necessarily represent official
OERI position or policy.

CS506082

INTRODUCTION

It starts quite simply. The professor of television production is asked to bring his or her students to film an annual award banquet for a local company. An intern is assigned to write a videotape script on training assembly line workers for the company. Members of the media faculty involved in the new technologies are asked by the provost to implement the electronic mail system that will be available university-wide. A professor emeritus is asked by a large company to research, develop and produce what will become a videotaped annual report to employees. A recent graduate of a large midwestern mass communications department is asked to design a computer assisted instructional program for another company. Over and over, the same scenario is played over and over again as the entrenched forms of media as well as the new technologies are being utilized by organizations and institutions. The components are much the same despite the varying assignments; a media professional is asked to do external or internal consulting. Some would argue that consulting is consulting and the rules for consulting in an organization are fairly much in place. What this essay argues is that media consulting requires adaptation. In sum, the responsible media communicator needs to be cognizant of the ethical concerns for the consultant and adapt these to the special needs of the client and the

technology used. The information age is upon us and as Wilson P. Dizard, Jr. has argued, "Success in our generation will depend on the degree to which we shape the new information technologies in accordance with human values. (Dizard, 1985, p.9). More than just the new technologies, the responsible media communicator/consultant needs to follow some guidelines that will protect not only the consultant but the company or organization they serve. This paper will first show the increase in media use by organizations, particularly of the new technologies; next, the guidelines suggested by organizational consulting that have been adapted to media will be advanced. Finally, some suggestions for future research will be discussed.

MEDIA USE BY MODERN ORGANIZATIONS

As Stewart L. Burge pointed out, "In the late 1960's and early 1970's many organizations jumped on the video bandwagon....Good video is not cheap, but many organizations have found that the costs of production and distribution are dollars well spent when measured by an "effectiveness of communication" yardstick." (1985, p. 190) The new technologies are presently being surveyed more extensively. For example, Hellweg, Frieberg and Smith (1984) conducted a survey of Fortune 500 companies in the U.S. and discovered that interactive computers were found in nearly every major corporation and electronic mail is used in half of the

companies. Two studies conducted in 1985 give an insight into impact of the computer on the organization. The first study by conducted by Purdue University in 1985 surveyed 387 manufacturers randomly selected. Briefly, of the companies responding 33% had access to microcomputers but 51 percent had at least one supervisor who used a micro. Of the companies surveyed, 63 percent had one or more supervisors who used a minicomputer or mainframes. The trend is moving away from mainframes toward the personal computer. Business Week's 1985 Guide to Careers estimates that there are currently 5.5 million personal computers in offices in the United States, and within four years, the International Data Corporation expects that number to increase seven fold to 35 million. A second study reported in the September 16, 1985 Wall Street Journal cited Dun and Bradstreet statistics showing that personal computers were used in the following manner: 65 percent for financial analysis; 73 percent for accounting; 57 percent for word processing; 38 percent for data base management; 32 percent for inventory control, 14 percent for credit analysis and 23 percent for purchasing. These statistics support a survey by Honeywell Techanalysis reported in Management Review, May, 1985. (Bryan, 1986, 38).

Harvard Business Review has also noted the impact is tremendous as computers grow more powerful and versatile and less expensive, and people in organizations tend to use them as a general purpose tool to gather and distribute

information and to talk with others. Besides message exchange and information retrieval, businesses are turning more and more to the computer for training applications. As Leslie Bryan, Jr., an associate professor in the Department of Supervision at Purdue University, has posited, the increasing use of computers in the workplace will mean increases in training on the equipment. He argues that it is important for trainers to stay tuned to the direction in which their company is moving with automation. This will require the trainer to determine if training in microcomputer or remote computers be required. In addition, they should constantly be monitoring areas of the organization in order to determine where computers will be productively utilized? (Bryan, 1986, 38-39).

Whether it be videotape, electronic mail, computer-based training or video-conferencing, the media professional is in an excellent place to offer expertise either as an internal or external consultant. The trend is moving toward more and more job opportunities in organizations as a result of the diffusion of media. With this potential, the responsibility of following ethical procedures is fairly much left up to the individual. It seems timely, to propose some suggested guidelines.

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR MEDIA CONSULTING

Before suggesting specific criteria to follow, it might be useful to look at research on consulting and identify some of the problems or concern. Richard Eich conducted a national survey several years ago and found that over half of the respondents mentioned that exaggeration of expertness as a major unethical practice. In sum, many consultants claimed to be expert in many areas when in reality they did not have the necessary background or training to help the client. Additionally, Eich found that 78 percent of the more experienced consultants believed that consulting agreements should be put in writing and should include such items as pay and expenses, objectives, responsibilities, obligations, statements pertaining to expected time or duration of the client-consultant relationship. (Eich, 1977) These two concerns lead us to several potential guidelines.

1. The responsible media consultant will not oversell his or her own expertise or that of an intern they are placing in an organization.
2. The responsible media consultant will spell out the details of his or her activities for the organization in contract form. Included in this contract will be items such as time, compensation, materials provided by either the consultant or the client, and the specific job to be done.

It is quite possible that the project may need to be done in stages with contracts written for each stage. For example, if the project is to be a videotaped annual report for employees, the first stage may be an audit to discover what employees wish to know about the company. The second stage may be the written script. The next stage may be the actual production of the tape and a final step may be the distribution of the tapes. If the project is particularly complex, individual contracts may be useful for both the client and the consultant.

3. If the media consultant is an educator or a media intern who wishes to share his or her project with an outside audience for educational purposes, this should be cleared before entering into the consulting relationship. Eich found that 91 percent of the respondents in his survey found that consulting is an aid in teaching while 81 percent reported that consulting was helpful to research. (Eich, 1977) Indeed, consulting activities provide rich, real-world experiences that can be useful in the learning environment.

However, the responsible media communicator/consultant also must preserve client confidentiality. For example, the author did some consulting for Procter and Gamble in Cincinnati. Although many of the experiences of working with this corporation can be shared in the classroom, the

consultant must be careful to not divulge any ideas of product development or any information that is not in the public domain. To insure that no questions about integrity can arise, the media consultant might be wise to leave all videotaped materials or research in the corporate facility. An important footnote should be added at this point about consulting with new technologies that are computer-oriented. The problem with computer security is a serious one. These new technologies are creating a security problem of potentially sensitive material. As Sherman argued in an article, "Is Your Vital Information Protected?"

The increase in volume of information also has resulted in a corresponding increase in its importance. Gone are the days when customers were known by name and their records were determined by checking a sheet or two of paper. Now a customer's information is recorded on a multitude of media, including computers....That information, which contains an organization's valuable customer-account relationships and establishes its asset/liability position, has become its most valuable asset. Most organizations realize the need for at least some form of information protection, but they are unsure how to implement a program. (Sherman, June, 1986, p. 50).

Adding a more specific warning about e-mail and voice-mail systems, Wright posits the following affirmation of the security issue with a slightly different wrinkle:

Despite their advantages, both systems have problems to overcome, mainly concerning

security. Although most message systems provide some security through identification codes and/or password requirements, users still can access each other's messages if codes or passwords are known. (Wright, June, 1986, p. 76)

Finally, R. E. Johnston, Contributing Editor to Infosystems crystalizes the issue by saying that as technology continues to move at a rapid pace, security risks are left in its wake. Among some of these problems are PBX message systems that have experienced long-distance calls being charged to that system from an external phone. In another example of penetration and sabotage of corporate message systems, recent problems have surfaced: these problems ranged from the destruction of messages to the introduction of false ones or attempts at extortion. (Johnston, 1986, 35). This leads us to the fourth guideline.

4. The responsible media consultant or intern must abide by the client-consultant confidentiality rule and must not, in any way, jeopardize the organization's information. Although this seems contradictory to the previous guideline, a rule of thumb to follow is to have prior clearance by the organization or supervisor in charge before discussing consulting activities in the classroom. Some professors skirt around this issue by not identifying the company by name in lecture. This is a potentially sensitive issue since students

may know the different clients the professor serves as a consultant.

In addition to these general guidelines regarding media consulting, if the consultant is providing training such as computer-assisted instruction or helping employees learn how to use new technologies such as electronic mail, a set of guidelines can be advanced. These five guidelines come to us from Charles Redding and are published in Gerald Goldhaber's text, Organizational Communication. They are as follows:

5. Respect for the Integrity of the Individual
(trainee)-trainees are treated with dignity.
6. Providing Opportunity for
Self-Actualization-training activities help trainees reach their true potential
7. Encouraging the Exercise of Critical
Faculties-trainers encourage trainees to keep an open mind towards the organization's goals by allowing ample opportunity for dialogue and expression by trainees.
8. Devoting Explicit Attention to Ethical Problems
and Issues-trainers include a discussion of ethics

(applied to both the organization and the training experience) by de-emphasizing ends-over-means objectives.

9. Concern for Long-Term Development of Trainees-trainers keep trainees' career paths and potential in sight by linking the training to their future career goals instead of just their immediate jobs. (Goldhaber, 1986, p. 389)

If the media consultant is also employed as a faculty or staff member of a university, it is recommended that they check their faculty handbook or with their Dean or personnel department as to the consulting guidelines in place. This brings us to the next guideline.

10. The media consultant, if a university staff or faculty member, should adhere to the consulting guidelines in place. These guidelines or rules may vary from institution to institution with absolutely no rules at one school to very prescribed formulas and procedures at another. Eich, for example, in his survey found that consulting may or may not help advance one's academic career. The respondents were split with 50 percent thinking it advanced their careers and 50 percent believed it had no effect.

Eleven percent believed it could be detrimental.
(Eich, 1977) The responsible media consultant, if employed full-time, must make every effort to see that their consulting does not create problems or jeopardize either their employer or client.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This essay is a preliminary outline for ethical guidelines for the media professional who either consults externally or supervises interns. We are on new ground, particularly in view of the new technologies that are diffusing rapidly. We need to start considering the ethical considerations before we come into a conflict of interest. As Hays has written of ethics for communications consultants:

....those principles and standards which guide the choices of alternative behaviors in the conduct of consulting with clients regarding the process of communication in an organization. Ethics here deals with the conduct that is approved or disapproved. It covers the range of any behavior that can be judged worthy or unworthy. What in the long range is judged good for the client, good for the consultant, and good for the profession, will be the criteria for the code of ethics....(Hays, 1972)

The ten guidelines are a beginning point. What needs to be done at this point is to survey media professionals to discover the amount and type of consulting that they do. In addition, we need to assess their problems and concerns and

ascertain how they deal with them. Finally, continued efforts towards developing a list of guidelines are needed. In particular, these guidelines will need to be comprehensive and, at the same time, flexible enough that they do not restrict the rich opportunity for real-world experiences for ourselves and our students.

SUMMARY

This essay has argued that the responsible media communicator is facing an organizational environment that provides rich opportunities for consulting. These opportunities may either be in the traditional media formats or with the new technologies. In order to maintain ethical standards, ten guidelines have been posited as a beginning point for media consultants who may be working in an academic setting.

As Dizard has argued, "Here is a challenge to match the promise of our democratic society as we move towards a new century. In little more than a generation, the technology to match this challenge has moved from the laboratories into everyday use....The United States has expanded its information production to the point that it is now the repository of the largest share of the world's organized knowledge." (1985, p. 17)

As teachers and researchers of media, we are often challenged and privileged to share our knowledge with the American organizations that are commanding this power. Whether we are providing production support or pedagogical services, we need to think about our responsibilities to assure that our future as consultants continues.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bryan, Leslie A., Jr. (1986, July). Supervisors With Micros: Trends and Training Needs. Training and Development Journal, 40, No. 7, 38-39.
- Burge, Stewart L. "Audiovisuals". Inside Organizational Communication edited by Carol Reuss and Donn Silvis, Second Edition. New York: Longman, 1985.
- Chester, Jeffrey A. (1986, May). Technology and Top Management. Infosystems, 33, No. 5, 34-35.
- Dizard, Wilson P., Jr. The Coming Information Age: An Overview of Technology, Economics, and Politics. Second Edition. New York: Longman, 1985.
- Eich, Ritch. "Communications Consulting Practices: State of the Art." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1977.
- Feuer, Dale, Jack Gordon, Ralph Pribble and Ron Zemke. (1986, March). Computers: Most Users Need Only Basic Training. Training, 23, No. 3, 14-15.
- Feuer, Dale, Jack Gordon, Ralph Pribble, and Ron Zemke. (1986, March). A Standard for Videodiscs: Will the Army Do It? Training, 23, No. 3, 15-16.
- Feuer, Dale, Jack Gordon, Ralph Pribble and Ron Zemke. (1986, January). Computer Literacy: Making "Easy" Learning Easy. Training, 23, No. 1, 14-15.
- Feuer, Dale, Jack Gordon, Ralph Pribble and Ron Zemke. (1986, February). CBT: Authoring Styles for the New and Nervous. Training, 23, No. 2, 70-71.
- Ferrarini, Elizabeth. (1986, August). Getting the Most from Online Databases. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 8, 28-31.
- Field, Anne R. and Catherine L. Harris. (1986, August 25). The Information Business: Despite a Slow Start, Many Still See a Bonanza in Selling Electronic Data. Business Week, 82-90.

- Finlay, Douglas. (1986, November). Facsimilie and Electronic Mail: Providing Better Accuracy and Speed for Tighter Communications. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 11, 17-22.
- Galati, Tess. (1986, October). Electronic Communication: Implications for Training. Training and Development Journal, 40, No. 10, 42-44.
- Goldhaber, Gerald M. Organizational Communication. Fourth Edition. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, Publishers, 1986.
- Gordon, Jack. (1986, April). Why CBT Isn't Just for Training Anymore. Training, 23, No. 4, 43-50.
- Gordon, Jack. (1986, October). Where the Training Goes? Training, 23, No. 10, 49-81.
- Gross, Lynne Schafer. Telecommunications: An Introduction to Radio, Television, and Other Electronic Media, Second Edition. Dubuque: Wm. C. Brown, Publishers, 1986.
- Hays, Ellis. "A Behavioral Objectives Approach to the Development of a Code of Ethics for Communication Consultants." Paper presented at a meeting of the International Communication Association, April, 1972.
- Hellweg, Susan, Kevin Freiberg, Anthony Smith. "The Pervasiveness and Impact of Electronic Communication Technologies in Organizations: A Survey of Major American Corporation." A paper presented at the Speech Communication Association meeting, Chicago, 1984.
- Johnston, R. E. (1986, December). The Risks of Change: Technology Continues to Move at a Rapid Pace, Often Leaving Vulnerabilities in its Wake. Infosystems, 33, No. 12, 35.
- Kiesler, Sara. (1986, January-February). The Hidden Messages in Computer Networks. Harvard Business Review, 64, No. 1, 46-60.
- Kimmerling, George F. (1986, March). Gaining Firm Ground. Training and Development Journal, 40, No. 3, 22-25.
- Kliem, Ralph L. (1986, May). Overcoming User Resistance to Microcomputers. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 5, 52-54.
- Laird, Dugan. Approaches to Training and Development, Revised Second Edition. Reading, Ma: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, Inc., 1985.
- Lee, Chris. (1982, April). Adding the New Technology to Your Training Repertoire. Training, 19, No. 4, 18-26.
- Mamis, Robert A. (1986, April). Managing Technology: Expect More from Those CDs. INC, 108.
- Mortensen, Erik. (1986, June). One Network. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 6, 39-46.
- Mallach, Efrem G. (1986, November). The Truth about Training for Computer Sales. Training and Development Journal, 40, No. 11, 54-59.
- Parson, Frederic W. (1986, September). Inexpensive Interactive Training. Training and Development Journal, 40, 9, 38-39.

- Paznik, M. Jill. (1986, June). The Automated Office: Make Computers and Software Easy, Then See If There's a Slump. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 6, 8-9.
- Redding, W. Charles. "The Ethical Considerations of Consultants and Graduate Students in Organizational Research." Paper presented at a meeting of the International Communication Association, April 1972.
- Rice, Ronald E. & Associates. The New Media: Communication, Research, and Technology. Beverly Hills, Ca: Sge Publications, 1985.
- Ross, Earl R. (1986, November). I'm An Electronic Mail Freak: To Find Out What Features You Do and Don't Need, Heed the Advice of a True Enthusiast. Infosystems, 33, No. 11, 56-57.
- Schiller, Zachery. (1986, August 25) Mead Makes Information Pay--Most of the Time. Business Week, 90.
- Settle, Peter L. (1982). Organizational Communication: Curricular Concerns, Practices, and Problems. Paper presented at Central States Speech Convention.
- Sherman, Lloyd E. (1986, June). Is Your Vital Information Protected? Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 6, 50-51.
- Siemasko, Dan. (1986, December). CBT Fantasies: The Ground Beckons. Training, 23, No. 10, 79-86.
- Siragusa, Gail. (1986, April). Voice Mail Takes Off. Administrative Management, XLVII, No. 4, 43-48.
- Spitzer, Dean. (1986, June). Five Keys to Successful Training. Training, 23, No. 6, 37-39.
- Stein, Jess, Editor. The Random House Dictionary. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.
- Thorpe, Judith Mosier. (1986, Fall). Electronic Mail, A New Media Technology Making Its Way from a Cubicle in Academe to the Corporate Setting. Journal of the Tennessee Speech Communication Association, 12, No. 2.
- White Collar Productivity: Putting Office Automation in the Hands of Those Who Can Maximize Its Potential. (1986, January). Infosystems, 33, No. 1, 56.
- Wright, Jan. (1986, June). E-Mail and Voice-Mail Systems: Conspirators or Competitors? Infosystems, 33, No. 6, Part 1, 74-76.
- Zemke, Ron. (1986, September). The Rediscovery of Video Teleconferencing. Training, 23, No. 9, 28-43.